

# THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF  
ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS  
(Section of the Library Association)


HON. EDITOR: T. I. M. CLULOW  
(Leeds City Libraries)

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## The Library Assistant Announcements

THE Inaugural Meeting of the 44th Session of the A.A.L. will be held at Chaucer House at 7 p.m. on the 18th January, 1939, when Mr. S. Hollingworth, of Upminster Bridge, Hornchurch, will address the meeting from the point of view of a "representative reader." This is a preliminary announcement and full details will be published in the January issue of *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT*. It is hoped, however, that as many members as possible will book this date now, as the subject of libraries viewed through the eyes of one who uses them should prove to be a tonic for librarian and assistant alike.

### ELECTION OF NATIONAL COUNCILLORS, 1939

The scrutineers appointed to supervise the election declare the result to be as follows :

#### *Elected :*

F. Seymour Smith	.	.	1,041	
W. Howard Halliday	.	.	994	
S. W. Martin	.	.	969	
W. Howard Phillips	.	.	962	
A. R. Hewitt	.	.	953	
Miss M. G. Baker	.	.	788	} equal
V. Woods	.	.	788	
Miss E. M. Exley	.	.	745	

#### *Not Elected :*

F. M. Gardner	.	.	715
W. B. Stevenson	.	.	659
R. L. W. Collison	.	.	651
H. V. Bonny	.	.	552
A. Shaw Wright	.	.	485
W. M. Martin	.	.	358
F. Higenbottam	.	.	316

1,589 valid voting-papers were received and counted.

14 voting-papers were disqualified.

4 voting-papers were received too late and not counted.

(Signed) S. G. Berriman ; H. K. Bristow ; R. B. Stokes ; A. J. Wells.

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### GREATER LONDON DIVISION

The December meeting of the Greater London Division will be held at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, 14th December, at the Southlands Branch of the Battersea Public Libraries, by kind permission of the Libraries Committee and the Chief Librarian of Battersea. Mr. E. R. J. Hawkins (Croydon) will read a paper entitled: "Cataloguing and mechanics." The Southlands Branch Library is in Battersea High Street. It is near Clapham Junction Station, and within reach of several bus and tram routes.

After the meeting voting will take place for two auditors to examine the past year's accounts. Nominations for these offices should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Central Library, Hackney, E.8, by 13th December.

### "RECOMMENDED BOOKS"

A copy of the current issue of *Recommended books* is circulated with each copy of this issue of THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT, in order to bring again to the attention of librarians the possibilities of the co-operative bulletin. The present subscription price is £3 10s. per 1,000, with approximately *pro rata* prices for smaller quantities. The name of any library can be printed on the cover for a small extra charge.

*Individual Subscriptions.* It is now possible to accept individual subscriptions for the bulletin, and the price has been fixed at 2s. per annum post free (overseas subscriptions, 3s. per annum post free). We regret that it is not possible to accept subscriptions for a less period than one year. A year's subscription covers 10 issues, and any special lists that may be occasionally issued. A card for subscription will be found with this issue of THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT, and this should be sent, with remittance, to Mr. J. T. Gillett, Hon. Treasurer, Association of Assistant Librarians, Central Library, Leeds, 1.

Mr. J. W. Perry has written to us apropos of Mr. Gardner's Open Letter to him on the subject of *Recommended books*, published last month, and says that while he does not accept all of Mr. Gardner's points, he is not prepared to continue the discussion. We are content to leave it at that.

### SURREY LIBRARY ASSISTANTS

A group of Surrey Library Assistants was formed early in the year and monthly meetings for the discussion of common interests are held at

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the libraries of the district in turn. The meetings are as informal as possible in order to encourage younger members to express their views. Anyone wishing for further details should write to Miss F. E. Young, Public Library, Carshalton.

The South-Western Division will in future be known as the Wessex Division of the A.A.L.

## Novels in Public Libraries

H. V. A. BONNY

*"I fly to my book as the opium smoker to his pipe."*—SOMERSET MAUGHAM

THAT much reading is in the nature of an opiate has, for the past decade, been affirmed by analytical psychologists, and this has been the purport of recent utterances of librarians anent so-called "escape" literature.

I will make no attempt to discuss the history of the novel and the history of libraries, both of which are written elsewhere. My purpose is to relate these two under modern society, a not inconsiderable force, when one considers that quite a quarter of the population of the United Kingdom are reading novels obtained from Public Libraries. I have therefore to consider the psychological and ethical aspects of novel-reading.

In doing this I wish to further limit my remarks to novel-reading for pleasure. Let us not begin an argument on the meaning of "pleasure"—or on what reading is pleasurable or otherwise. Yet it would seem an obvious fact that all reading is done for pleasure, though this pleasure may be intrinsic, to which type I hope to confine my argument, or ultimate. Even reading books which are sordid and unhappy may bring pleasure to a person of a sadistic nature.

The most popular type of book that is read nowadays is the novel. The student of the folk-lore of the past will tell us that folk-lore has its modern equivalent in the novel—a form of literature only about 250 years old. During this time the novel has attempted to satisfy incipient demands of succeeding generations for horror, for history, for home, for humour. These modern novels are chiefly enjoyed by the reader identifying him or her self with one of the characters. It is a process of identification—and the story is compensating for the deficiencies of real life.

But what are the deficiencies of real life? Primitive man had little

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time for any physical or psychical energy beyond that which was necessary for his existence. His physical and psychical energies were almost wholly devoted to getting his livelihood, and he had to continually act upon his instincts of escape, combat, pairing, assertion, food-seeking, and so on, to obtain his livelihood. That this is not so in this complex and highly civilized form of existence is well known, yet investigation has shown that primitive man is submerged in the modern adult, and that we all go through the primitive form of existence during our early years, our life being telescoped. Psychologically, it is a most painful procedure for the modern child to fit in with contemporary society. He is born with the same mental equipment and instincts as the savage and cannot, for example, use his instinct of pugnacity to the full; so he reads war and western stories. As man gained more control over his environment, becoming organized into States and Nations and working with Nature, and became as an individual more peaceably minded, not resorting to force at every opportunity, he had more psychic energy than was necessary for biological ends.

Therefore, as hinted in the case of the boy mentioned above, the novel enables us to do in fiction what we might otherwise do in real life. We cannot, without suffering severe penalties—both physical and moral—act upon our instincts. We have been taught and tamed by civilization! A properly developed being must, for example, display his instincts of pugnacity, sex, and so forth. But modern society puts a limit upon our aspirations. Polygamy is taboo. Hence, as one outlet, we resort to the novel—the novel of “escape.” No attempt can here be made to list all the types of novels and the instincts to which they appeal. The crux of the question of the appeal of the romance (or the sexual story) is summed up in the spinster’s remark, “I would like a love story—there’s not much love in Newville.” She, of course, is not the only sufferer—the confessions of married folk may come out in an analysis of their reading.

Generally speaking, the detective story appeals to the reader’s curiosity. Again, there is identification, and it is the reader himself who solves the mystery. Also, many people who are mathematically minded are attracted by the modern detective novel, which now often reaches a complexity comparable with a mathematical problem. I remember a university lecturer in mechanics telling me of his love of detective stories, as they kept his mind in trim for the solving of his problems.

It is only occasionally that, in reading a detective story, the reader is primarily interested in a character rather than the plot. Lord Peter Wimsey

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is an instance of a character in a detective novel who is interesting in himself. But since Gaboriau invented the detective story seventy years ago, its purpose has much altered. For Gaboriau, the detective novel was another means by which he could depict various characters, but, in later years, the detective story gained in technique, so it lost in characterization. Readers must see the clues and make their own deductions, the human interest itself being omitted. This prevents characters being analysed, as such a procedure would give the reader an undue advantage over the detective. One never sees the workings of the mind of the criminal, who is, after all, the *raison d'être* of the story. Again, to achieve the surprise ending that is the aim of most detective story writers, the identity of the criminal must be concealed, which necessitates the omission of much of the human interest.

To-day the public library is as much a part of the social structure as the school or college. It is part of the organization of the State. The State exists for the good of the people. It may restrict some people, but it takes care of the masses. The public library does not satisfy every demand, but it seeks to satisfy the intelligent demand of its borrowers.

Should the novel of "escape" be supplied in this social institution? Many people read novels because in this highly civilized state they are unable to lead a fully developed life. They are in many respects unfulfilled, and they are surrounded by repressions, inhibitions, and suppressions. This type of novel is a valuable and essential part of our social structure. It allows people to deflect and sublimate their lives so that they form happier members of society—so that they do not interfere with the workings of society. Novel-reading may thus serve a biological purpose.

To attempt a review of the social functions of all varieties of reading is impossible in this short space. Neither have we mentioned the quality of these novels as literature. Their literary standard may well be higher than that of many non-fiction works.

Novel-reading, therefore, must not be disparaged, for it is an essential part of modern society. Novels have their appeal to our instincts. Humorous stories will appeal to our instinct of laughter and, generally speaking, the comic element in reading is produced by incongruity or by someone else's misfortune, which latter often implies incongruity.

Is the incessant devouring of light fiction so bad as we imagine? It is certainly deplorable, but it is infinitely better than the instincts coming out in socially undesirable directions—to this extent public libraries are performing an indispensable task in the functioning of modern society.

## Beginners, Please!

R. H. MATTHEWS<sup>1</sup>

**D**URING the Great War, the conduct of the generals at the Base came in for much adverse commentary from the infantry in the trenches.

These beribboned potentates, with the utmost gallantry and disregard for other people's lives, threw their troops against unbroken barbed wire, and across featureless swamps, while they sat some twenty miles behind the lines and drew the medals. I cannot help drawing a parallel between the mental attitude of their troops and that of the outlook of a junior in a lending library. In both cases the person who really counts, the person who should be able to deal with every situation, is not at the scene of action. The troops get the machine-gun fire, the generals the medals. The junior flounders in the swamp of inexperience; the senior, with all his knowledge, is frequently inaccessible. And is it not a paradox that the man who should be a guide, philosopher, and friend to his public, the maestro, should be pinned to his desk by office routine, while his true function is performed by inexperienced, nervous, and often misinformed juniors. Too often the man who should be a beacon to guide his public hides his light, if not under a bushel, at least behind a ground-glass door plainly labelled *PRIVATE*.

There is in every profession dull but necessary work which is usually given to beginners. This is unavoidable because the older and more experienced people are unwilling to waste both their time and their more expert knowledge on monotonous work. As we all know, our profession is no exception. There is work to be done, especially in preparing new books, which in Aldous Huxley's *Brave new world* would surely be assigned to those unfortunate individuals known as Epsilon semi-morons; work which requires little or no brainwork, and which consists of the constant repetition of, perhaps, half a dozen movements of the hand.

In the film, "Modern times," you will remember, Charlie Chaplin's sole job consisted of tightening two nuts as they came past him on an endless belt. So monotonous was this work that, when he had finished for the day, his hands went on jerking while he was trying to eat his meal. I am not suggesting that the collating, stamping, labelling, and pocketing of books has the same effect upon a junior, but the mental attitude that such work engenders must be very similar. The placing of a stamp squarely

<sup>1</sup> A revision of a paper read to the East Midland Division of the A.A.L. at Chesterfield on 20th October, 1938.

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upon a page, or the correct positioning of a book pocket cannot be called a very inspiring job. (But it is interesting to note how difficult some people find this apparently simple process.) Monotony is the curse of our mechanical age, and even in our profession, which has such potentialities of variety, apparently it cannot be avoided. But it is at least possible to see that this stultifying kind of work is not made the inevitable lot of the beginner. In doing this we should ensure that the first weeks, or months, of professional life are not soured by a round of monotony that could easily be avoided.

That is, very briefly, the position of the junior as a drudge. When doing this work he is expected to be a non-intellectual automaton. In some other respects he is expected to be an expert. He begins his day, as often as not, with straightening the shelves—apparently a simple and eminently foolproof proceeding. But to replace books correctly on the shelves needs some knowledge of classification and cataloguing, which the junior is assumed to have acquired in some miraculous way without any training at all.

The same applies in such work as the filing of stock and catalogue cards. At slack times in the library the junior is often told to make himself useful by doing some filing. How very simple it sounds, and indeed would be, if it were merely a case of knowing the alphabet, and if all cards were made out absolutely correctly throughout the system, or if we had, in England, a system of printed cards like those of the library of Congress. But this, of course, is not so. There are two practical ways of avoiding error. The junior can ask every time he comes up against a dubious heading. But when he has asked, say a dozen times in the course of an hour, "Where should so-and-so or such-and-such be placed?" neither he nor his informant are in the same mood as when they started. In any case, the work of both is slowed up and perhaps rendered even more inaccurate. The other way is to provide a printed or typed guide, placed where the junior can see it in the course of his work. Without these two time-wasting guides the junior is left to his native wit. And as native wit varies in juniors as in other people, so the placing of the cards varies with unfortunate and sometimes very aggravating results. So long as inexperienced juniors are allowed and encouraged to do this work, our cataloguing and records of stock will be at fault. And the blame will not lie with the junior.

Again, that a junior should be pitchforked, during his very first days, into the bustle and rush of a busy lending department is foolish and even



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rather cruel. He (or she) comes probably straight from school, without previous experience of work either in public or with the public. And public places and public faces are very often incredibly trying. For the junior the very place is embarrassing. He feels like a strange animal in a zoo cage, or like a target to be shot at. The eyes of everyone seem to be upon him. He blunders, he is constantly forced to admit his ignorance, and, worse (he feels), to disturb and annoy his seniors with constant inquiry. The fact that he has to carry out his work under the eyes of so many people when he is, as yet, not even used to being in a public place, is at least prejudicial to his methods. And it is possible that he never thereafter quite loses those slipshod evasions that he then adopted in order to do his work without attracting unaccustomed attention. Inefficiency in the work or methods of an assistant might well be traced back to those early days when he was forced to make shift for himself.

And from another point of view—are the public satisfied with tedious delay, with inaccurate information, or even with admissions of ignorance? I rather fancy not. It is, after all, very poor consolation after about five minutes' delay, to be told by an apologetic senior that "they will find out for them—if they wouldn't mind waiting a moment." At busy times of the day the junior is called upon to answer questions that are entirely out of his scope. For these there can be no printed guide. Such guides as are provided are difficult for a beginner to understand and, to them, seem to present as many complications as that masterpiece of infernal ingenuity, a German railway time-table.

For a senior assistant to help promptly is very often impossible because these latter are already busy enough with other work. In any case there is delay and confusion. Often in the process of being passed on, the inquiry quite loses its original form and meaning, so that the lady who asked for a book to illustrate the designs on dalmatics, is presented with a guide-book to the Dalmatian coast! The indignant inquirer will not usually trouble to find out that she made her inquiry of a beginner. Such a haphazard and harassed beginning to a career helps to engender in the junior those habits of inconsequent thought and untidy work that both examiners and librarians find so hard to understand.

It is sometimes thought advisable to allow several new juniors to start at the same place at the same time. Presumably this is because, if you work it out by rule of thumb, it is quicker to teach three people at one and the same time, than to teach each one separately. Furthermore, by receiving

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their instructions from one person a certain uniformity of method and level of knowledge will be obtained. However, this is assuming that the level of intelligence is the same in every newcomer. This, of course, is by no means so. One junior will pick up an idea in half the time of another. If this disparity of intelligence is not recognized, the speed of instruction and comprehension is slowed up. Pace is regulated by that of the slowest, and duties are allotted accordingly. The bright junior has to perform, for practice, the things which he has thoroughly grasped, in order that his slower companions may not be left behind. This is but a return to my former remarks about drudgery. What, to one junior is a task requiring concentration, is for another mere vain repetition, and, once again, those feelings of what might be termed frustration are encouraged in the mind of the junior.

I have tried to show why juniors so often feel depressed during the first weeks of their library work; and why, even when they have overcome that depression, their work often does not have that extra gloss of enthusiasm that would not only rejoice the heart of the librarian, but would carry with it that assurance of good work in the future. This oppressive sense of monotony and inadequacy must be removed. There has been suggested what is, I think, the only solution to this problem. Let every junior be given at least two to three months behind the scenes in a central library. During this time he can be moved from department to department within the library and thus acquire, as it were, a cosmopolitan knowledge of library work. The junior that is ultimately presented to the public is no longer a sheepish individual, ignorant of the workings of the simplest divisions of classification, or the mysteries of the card catalogue, but he is an assistant reasonably acquainted with the inner workings of his profession, a source, not of irritation and delay, but of invaluable service.

Aldous Huxley is very interesting when he talks about conditioning people to like certain work. We should, I think, apply some of this psychology in the training of juniors so that they might be prevented from acquiring that dislike or subconscious fear of the public, which too often pervades their work to-day. If their antipathy to counter work is to be checked they must be persuaded that counter work is the reward of merit in less important work, and in fact, that it is the highest form of self-determination.

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R. L. W. COLLISON

### Valuations

“WHAT happens in Sheffield to-day will be history to-morrow,” says the *Sheffield* annual report in a paragraph which pleads for the preservation of local material. The statement applies especially to reading: the latest annual report is an impressive example of the intelligent use of statistics. Due allowance is made for the human factor of error through carelessness, and for incalculable factors, and the figures thus given are the more convincing. Issued with the Annual Report is “A Survey of children’s reading,” in which a detailed analysis is made of 2,500 issues from ten buildings to children between the ages of seven and sixteen. The issues from each building were consecutive and the complete statistics reveal some remarkable conclusions. The girls exceeded the boys by more than 50 per cent., but the boys read twice as much non-fiction. Poetry and drama were the most popular classes of non-fiction among the girls, and machinery and engineering among the boys. The count was carried out on an admirably thorough scale: the reasons for taking and returning each book were elicited by assistants, and the answers noted in detail. Nine tables of analyses of the statistics thus obtained are printed as an appendix, and Sheffield has not shirked printing the children’s comments. It is impossible to do such a remarkable piece of research justice in this space, and I hope that everyone who is interested will obtain a copy for their own perusal.

At the risk of being adjudged prejudiced in favour of *Lancashire*—a county which I have never visited—I must mention the efforts of the *Prescot* Branch of the Lancashire County Library. Armed with a duplicator, an artistic pen, and an ever-fresh imagination, Mr. Crouch has produced several very good lists—complete with illustrations—and a very readable monthly bulletin in which he exploits the best of his stock to the full. The bulletin has a printed cover with an effective symbolic design, and the layout of the contents is sober and without error. The *Lancashire* Staff Guild’s Bulletin is full of enthusiasm and devastating criticism—of which you may judge for yourself from the extracts printed in Miss Carnell’s article in October’s issue of *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT*. It is difficult to avoid the impression that many of the best articles on professional affairs appear in the regional magazines.

*Gillingham’s* “Introduction to the library service,” printed in *Gill Sans*

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on a background of an aggressive yellow, achieves its purpose of attraction and readable information. From *Woolwich* come more examples of the intelligent use of Gill Sans: two lecture lists, whose covers are not the least of their good points. The lectures for adults has a cover of grey with lettering of scarlet, while the children's pamphlet has a yellow base with lettering in white (a little obscure) and black. Both are reminiscent of the best of Underground advertising, with their flair for balance and for the right colours. *Deptford's* leaflets of lectures print very short lists of books at the bottom of the reverse side, and it is very possible that this method is more effective than the usual bulky booklet with its page of books for every lecture. Incidentally, Deptford's Annual Report reveals that it was the first library to approach the G.P.O. Film Unit for displays of films, an example which has been followed by more than forty other authorities in other parts of the country.

*Beckenham* sends a poster which was used for a display of books on the "Crisis." On a vivid background of scarlet the letters of the word were made up of cuttings from the newspapers of the time, a particularly sinister—or macabre—finish being given to the poster by the use—as the full stop—of a portrait of Hitler! A Staff Manual from *Nottingham* vies with the text-books in thoroughness (the vexed question of light failure is solved by the provision of "candles and matches") and is indeed as large as Mr. Phillips' book on Classification, its binding being designed to last—are Nottingham's instructions really as static as this suggests? To describe "What Croydon reads" takes nearly fifty pages, including nine columns of index, and it is of great interest to see how one library will pay special attention to items which another librarian would take for granted, and, of course, vice versa. The Report is a model of thoroughness, but not of good printing, and the illustrations of the two new branches show workable but not especially attractive buildings.

*St. Pancras* has issued a monumental catalogue of an Exhibition and Display illustrating St. Pancras through the Ages, compiled by the Public Libraries staff and filled with illustrations. Another rich Metropolitan library, *Westminster*, devotes the most part of a dignified report to an account of the history of the system, but omits the magnificent story of the legal fight which is recounted in Sanderson. The financial statistics at the back are breath-taking; a population of 129,000, a total income of £26,000, of which nearly £6,000 is devoted to books and binding and nearly £12,000 to salaries—an average of £300 per assistant!

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Good printing is to be expected from *Derbyshire* and the latest annual report does not disappoint. One of the county's most interesting projects is the establishment at Swadlincote—an independent library authority—of a regional branch for the southern portion of the county: a legitimate move with some curious possibilities with regard to Reference work and the problem of subscribers. With the county library's annual report comes an account of the development of the School Museum Service, an experiment under the scheme suggested by the C.U.K.T. Cases containing displays of specimens are circulated to schools in the county, many of the specimens being supplied by Government departments and private firms, their subjects ranging from prehistoric life to textile industries. *Bristol* sends a handsome set of publications, remarkable for their fine printing, but lacking Miss Ross's customary and welcome illustrations and decorations. Among the lists are a Catalogue relating to the fourth centenary of the English Bible (a scholarly piece of work with some interesting reproductions), a bibliography of the works of L. A. G. Strong, and two lecture lists in which Mr. Strong also appears. *Chelmsford* provide films as well as talks this year, and *Wallasey* is sponsoring an intensive discussion of Democracy or Dictatorship? with an elaborate and rather overwhelming booklist and synopsis. A very effective design for the cover of *Sheffield's* lecture list—lettering in dark blue on light blue—introduces a first-class list of lecturers who include Phyllis Bentley, Olaf Stapledon, and Sir Norman Angell.

*Long Eaton's* latest annual report is a short but very readable account of good work in a small system, its production being of great simplicity but with a corresponding gain in dignity. The *North-Western Polytechnic's* first issue of a short bulletin is a four-page leaflet, made additionally attractive by the charming crest of the Polytechnic. *Paddington* continues to be whimsical with the caption on its folder: "no fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds, NOVEMBER." *Stratford* has produced two excellent booklists with cover designs of originality and distinction: "Tongues of men" deals with English and foreign languages, while "The Englishman's castle" is concerned with domestic topics from gardening to babies. *Bethnal Green* imitate the commercial folder with a list of modern novels whose title is only to be seen on the inside of the cover, the cover itself reading: "There is nothing like a good novel! How often have we——" which of course is an irresistible invitation to look inside.

*Watford's* annual report is doubly welcome because it is illustrated,

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and because its illustrations are of the new North Watford Branch. Unfortunately, both illustrations are from the same angle and the reader gains more knowledge of the double entrance counter than of the appearance of the building. The issues—519,792—are high for a town of this size, the percentage of borrowers being almost thirty. *The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine* has a committee whose qualifications are in each case longer than their names, and the title page, which bears these details, is over-awing. As may be assumed, work in a library of this type is concerned principally with what in a municipal library is the cream of reference library research, and "much of the staff's time and energy is taken up in bibliographical research."

*Lowestoft* has produced an annual report in the same format as its bulletin, but it is not as successful, the borough arms being less forceful than the fine symbolic design of the booklist. The size of type, conditioned by the smallness of the page, is too small, but the report is of good issues and first-rate work.

*Coventry's* list on photography and cinematography is full of good and specialized books, while its bi-monthly booklist, which is not remarkable for its printing, out-Croydon's Croydon with its bibliographical details and stolid but informative annotations. The third number of *Dacaal*, the house-organ of the Devon and Cornwall Division, is as good as ever, and contains three articles which might just as well have appeared in one of the national journals.

*Johannesburg*, with its compliment slip in Afrikaans and English, reminds one of the very different problems which confront South African librarians. Decrease in issues is attributed to the large number of "ticker" libraries—apparently a South African version of the chain library. In the financial statement is an item of nearly £1,200 expenditure on "native wages, food, and expenses," the next item being "uniforms—European." *Eastbourne's* well-produced annual report mentions a permanent loan of a collection of new French books to the value of 10,000 francs, from the Cercle Française. *Halifax*, in its latest bulletin, records the addition of Yvonne French's "Ouida—a study in ostentation," with the annotation: "'Ouida' was a popular novelist, author of 'Under two flags'—so quickly does reputation perish!

## Students' Problems : XIII

D. H. HALLIDAY

I JUST have time to substitute for my intended contribution a consideration of the points raised by Mr. Broomhead in his letter to the Editor in the November number. If others regard my "allegations" as "startling" I would ask them to re-read "Students problems : XI." Mr. Horrocks' arguments, which I merely endorsed, are such sound sense that they defy challenge, and I cannot see that Mr. Broomhead has so much as assailed a single point. I do feel strongly, however, that my critic bases his ideas on a mistaken regard for professional education, and I would like to use this opportunity to suggest another viewpoint to any who think like Mr. Broomhead.

For as many years as librarianship has been a profession, everyone who has tried to improve conditions has been striving to make our examinations real standards of qualification. Apart from all other aims, this has been necessary in order to convince local authorities that our training in libraries means something—that a qualified person is worth a high salary. I do not suggest that we have gone all the way yet, but we *are* slowly approaching that goal—even if only by way of consolidation, in bringing backward systems into line with those of more progressive authorities. To have passed the Intermediate examination, for example, must mean that a person is capable of performing the duties of a classifier and cataloguer—if it is to have any value. Can Mr. Broomhead say that four or five months' study, no matter how intensive, will be sufficient to achieve that standard? With what respect would local authorities view examinations which required so little effort? Would they not find that the bright young people who passed the examinations were bewildered by, and unfitted for, the very work of which their paper qualifications certified them capable? Would they not be quick to compare these standards with those of other municipal departments, and decide that the qualifications of librarianship were not worth the same consideration in grading schemes?

Fortunately, our examinations have more meaning than that. Their aim is to pass those candidates who, in addition to text-book knowledge, show a practical and experienced outlook on the subject—which cannot be gained in a few months, but must come gradually. Occasionally someone will pass after only a brief period of study, without having covered the syllabus, and without the necessary practical knowledge. This, I

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repeat, is a matter of luck. It is a failure on the part of the examiners—for which they cannot usually be blamed, because it is a failure of the examination system. It is as well for all of us that such instances are rare.

So much for one principle involved. As to the other—the individualistic basis as opposed to the professional—Mr. Broomhead's own arguments carry more force when directed *against* his conclusion. I stake all my experience as a tutor in Classification in saying that the average person who attempts to master this section of the syllabus in five months or less must transform himself into an automaton for the saturation of text-book knowledge, which will be forgotten a few months later. Not only is he unable to take part in social activities, but so great must be his concentration on the text-books that his work in the library becomes meaningless and detached from the studies which it should supplement. The idea of a "daily accumulation of general library knowledge" is excellent, and one which I have presented on every possible occasion, but obviously time is necessary for the complete digestion and co-ordination of the knowledge of the text-books and the wisdom of experience. Moreover, the assistant must have time also to devote to his extra-library activities, the importance of which Mr. Broomhead wisely emphasizes. But why does Mr. Broomhead think that these arguments point towards the inadequate period of four or five months' intensive study, culminating, in nine cases out of ten, in disheartening failure and weary preparations for another ordeal?

*Candidates, beware!* Entrants continually jeopardize their chances in the examination by attempting to unload *all* their knowledge upon the examiners. For example, in answer to a question which says "Define," giving a list of some six terms, I find that a series of essays are almost invariably given. Not only does this spend well over the prescribed thirty minutes, but in such cases the formal definitions—the object of the question—are not given. Hence, though the student may have discussed the terms in a quite capable manner, no marks have been earned *in answer to the question*. This emphasizes once more the importance of reading questions carefully, reflecting on the form the answer should take before beginning to write. Words such as *Explain, Describe, Criticize, Discuss, Compare, Define, Enumerate, and List*, are full of meaning. They are clues to what the examiners want and the basis on which the questions are marked.

Another point, for all candidates who pride themselves on a sense of



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humour—the *last* place to air it is in an examination paper. Invariably it will fall flat. And that is not the whole of the damage! Nearly all such clumsy attempts at “smartness” are aimed against the public, and sometimes the effect is so singularly inept as to give the impression that the candidate has not begun to understand his job—part of which is understanding the public. So, whatever gems of sparkling satire flash in your mind, resist the urge to reproduce them for the examiner’s benefit. He will better appreciate a straightforward answer to the question he has set.

*The usual series of comments on the Elementary and Intermediate examination papers will appear next month.*

## The County Scene

E. J. CARNELL

COMMITTEES rank among the major burdens of life in twentieth-century England. The future social historian will probably class them with factors contributing to the decadence of democracy.

We are born into homes the sanctity of which is invaded by the minutes of the Mothers’ Union and the accounts of the local Cricket Club. We proceed to schools in which experience of committee procedure is considered a part of the young democrat’s education, and thence into a world in which every activity, political, philanthropic, cultural, or sporting, is regulated by a committee.

With such a background it is not surprising that county librarians, faced with the task of establishing several hundred points of contact with the public, cheerfully proceeded to hang around the necks of themselves and their successors the millstone of hundreds of local committees.

In this article we are not concerned with village committees, if any survive, nor with the central Committee, but with the local sections of the Library Sub-Committee of the Education Committee of the county authority—more simply, if less accurately, county branch committees.

Three charges are levelled against these bodies—apathy, ignorance, and futility. An outstanding example of the apathetic committee is provided by a contributor who, with more regard for local feelings than they deserve, prefers to remain anonymous:

“In this town the local committee regards the library as a kind of foster-child which, in a weak moment, it has been bamboozled into adopting;

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having once been adopted it must be given house-room, but just let the brat start asking for more !

" I will ask you to try to visualize a committee constituted somewhat on these lines : a chairman who presides automatically over almost every other committee of the local council, who regards a library committee meeting as just another engagement in a very full programme, who has only once visited the library during two years of office and considers it good enough ' for the working classes ' ; four miscellaneous town councillors with a wealth of platitudes at their command and a mortal fear of ' the thin end of the wedge ' ; three members of the County Council (two rarely seen), and one co-opted member of the County Library Committee. One might at least expect consistent support from members of the County Council, yet on occasion, one or another will explain apologetically that he cannot support this or that proposal because he does not directly represent the ratepayers of the town !

" Despite the fact that not more than four committee meetings are held annually, it is frequently necessary to sandwich them in between the meetings of two other committees, allowing, perhaps, a bare quarter of an hour for the discussion of library business. To find that this precious time has almost elapsed before the necessary quorum of three can be found is discouraging to say the least ; yet this has been my bitter experience on more than one occasion.

" What *can* be done to save the local committee from apathy ? Reports, however attractively prepared, too frequently remain unread—as is obvious from the futile questions asked in committee. News of developments in other branches, with a tentative suggestion that something of the kind might be attempted here, elicit only the terse comment : ' They can afford it ; we can't. ' "

This is a bad case, but not an isolated one. Under any organization such a committee is a deadweight of discouragement to the unfortunate branch librarian. When, as in this case, the branch is supported by a special rate, the committee is an insuperable obstacle to progress.

" One grows tired," this correspondent writes, " of reading and of hearing from superior officers, that the Branch Library Committee may not do this or that ; that the County Council is the ultimate authority and so on. The fact remains that the local committee is virtually responsible for the standard of service in its own particular district and must make the first move towards any desired extensions." One ought not to grow tired of

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the truth and the fact ought not to remain, but while differential rates are levied one will and it does. The development of branches is stultified in counties which pursue the fatuous policy of handing over the financial control of their branches to local councils which know nothing about libraries, care nothing about libraries, and, legally, have no responsibility for libraries. If differential rating were a permanent feature of the county library service the outlook would be black indeed, for so long as we have differential rating so long shall we have local committees. During the past three and a half years a number of counties have abandoned special rating, and, though they are outnumbered by the diehards, there is no reason to doubt that sooner or later, we pray sooner, it will be abandoned everywhere. Unhappily, the English habit of preserving institutions after their functions have been forgotten has prevented the abolition of local committees following upon the abandonment of the special rate. At this point let me quote from two other contributors :

"When a flat rate is levied, the committee serves no useful purpose. Most members of library committees have little or no knowledge of library work, and in everything that matters, rely on the guidance of Headquarters representatives and Branch Librarians. Even in such an important thing as an appointment of staff they are guided mainly or wholly by the County Librarian or his deputy. I defy any Branch Librarian who is worthy of his, or her, job to name any single task that could not be done just as well without the help of the committee."

"It cannot be said that the committee is there to see that its own particular district receives adequate attention, because the administrative staff are the best judges of the quality of service needed. Many Branch Librarians must, like myself, start thinking feverishly before every meeting for some little things to fill up the agenda. Surely, this is a sheer waste of time, particularly as it affects members of the committee."

"It is quite possible to establish and maintain good relations with the members of the local Council without taking up valuable time which they might devote to subjects more in need of their supervision."

"There are cases where an enthusiastic chairman can be of very great assistance, but even this can be harmful, because the Librarian might come to have no reliance on his own initiative."

"I can think of no important reason why County Branches should continue to have local committees, and to procrastinate their abolition simply from fear of isolated protests implies either timidity or excess of

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indulgence, or a mixture of both." (*Clifford Rimmer, Bamber Bridge Branch, Lancs.*)

"I have had experience of one county which has local committees and one which has not, and the impression which I have been given is that they are undesirable.

"In theory, they stimulate interest in the branch by giving prominent local residents a share in its control. In practice, however, the right people will not take an active and continuous interest in the committee unless it has some real control over the amount of money to be spent on the local branch, and the ways in which that money shall be spent. But if it has such powers, it will probably use them to make the branch as far as possible independent. To the members of the committee the branch will not be the Blanktown branch of the County Libraries, taking its place with the other branches and centres in one complete system; it will be the Blanktown Public Library, existing solely to serve the needs of the town.

"A branch ought not to serve only the people of the town in which it is situated; it should be open also to residents in the surrounding villages... but to a local committee, thinking only of the town and its needs, it may seem far from desirable that the branch should be open to people living outside the town. There are in fact many branches which, largely owing to the influence of local committees, are not open to residents in surrounding villages.

"The policy of the County Librarian and his committee of the County Council, thinking of the county as a whole, is likely often to differ from the policy of the local committee, thinking mainly of its own town. When these two policies clash, it will be difficult to avoid disputes, with unfortunate effects on the library service, and in particular on the position of the Branch Librarian, who owes direct allegiance to the County Librarian, but has to work with his local committee.

"There is also a danger that local dissensions may interfere with the work of the committee. Sometimes members of one faction have a majority on a committee, and their opponents, merely for that reason, take no interest in the work of the library, or even hinder it.

"Some of these disadvantages can be overcome by so restricting the powers of the local committee that it cannot alter to any important extent the policy of the County Library as a whole. But in that case prominent local men are not likely to take much interest in it. Its meetings will be thinly attended—there may not be a quorum on occasions—and there will

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be very little return for the arduous work of drafting and typing records and minutes.

"There is one way in which a local committee may be of use. In a county which has no Library Sub-Committee, the support of a local committee may on occasions be valuable to the County Librarian in his efforts to move his Education Committee.

"But with this exception I think that the disadvantages of local committees far outweigh their advantages, and that there are more efficient ways of stimulating local interest." (*E. P. Pritchard, Herefordshire Headquarters.*)

These extracts cover the main case against local committees. Nobody has written in their defence and after nine years as a county branch librarian I am not doing so. It is easy, of course, for me and other relatively irresponsible people to tell the world through the pages of the LIBRARY ASSISTANT that local committees ought not to be. The County Librarian who sets out to persuade (a) his Director of Education, (b) his Committee that branch committees should be liquidated and then writes to those committees to convey the news, is tackling a rather tougher task. In fact, if we wait for individual county librarians to do this, and further, to succeed in doing it, most of us will be drawing our pensions first.

The breaking up of all parochial methods of financing, governing, and administering county libraries is essential to the full development of the service, and, incidentally, to the solution of those problems of staff salaries and prospects we were discussing last month. It is a universal problem. Attack upon it should not be left to isolated efforts by the more intrepid county librarians. A planned and mass attack offers the best chance of success and would arouse less bitterness than more personal efforts. Would it not be worth trying to tempt the County Councils' Association into consultation with the County Libraries Section upon county library finance and government?

*The next article will be a survey of the hopes and accomplishments of county library work in 1938. All who have observations to make on this or other topics are asked to send them direct to Miss E. J. Carnell, County Branch Library, Victoria Street, Morecambe, Lancs., within the next few days.*

## The Library Assistant

### Our Library

*Public library finance*, by Fred Barlow. Philip. 5s.

*Public library finance*, by Duncan Gray. Allen & Unwin. 5s.

THE chief impression the reviewer is bound to get, after reading these two books successively and laying them down, is that a very valuable text-book would have resulted from the co-operation of these two authors, and a good deal of overlapping been prevented. Not merely overlapping, for some of Mr. Gray's virtues are Mr. Barlow's deficiencies, and vice versa. The subject of library finance is not really a very wide one, and if only from the point of view of the convenience of the student, it seems a pity that the opportunity of producing a compact text-book has been lost.

But since two books have been written, one must review them separately. There is one big difference between the two volumes in that Mr. Gray is concerned chiefly with the financing of public libraries, while Mr. Barlow is concerned chiefly with the handling of the accounts resulting from library expenditure. Mr. Gray outlines principles; Mr. Barlow devotes himself to practice. For the library assistant, therefore, Mr. Barlow's book will be found the more valuable for examination purposes, and Mr. Gray's book the more valuable for special reading, and for the prospective chief. This cleavage is discernible at the outset when both authors deal with estimates. This is Mr. Gray's most important chapter, in which he presents in a permanent form his figures for standards of expenditure given at a recent conference, and argues at some length the case for "per head" estimating. Mr. Barlow is more prosaic, giving only the processes of estimating, and dismissing its principles with the words—"estimating for a library that is established and does not propose any extension of the services, mostly resolves itself into repeating last year's figures."

After this initial cleavage, the two authors come together again in similar handling of orders and accounts, and here one would like to quarrel with both authors for their calm assumption that the methods they describe, chosen from among many others, are the best—although they do not describe the same method. Mr. Gray favours the ruled order giving book details, and a loose-leaf accession register—"the columned order form being much the best, clearest, and quickest in use." But Mr. Barlow thinks this is "a cumbersome and impracticable piece of machinery." What is

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the poor assistant to think? Both authors decry the use of the invoice as accession register, and Mr. Barlow seems unaware of its significance, since he speaks of copying accession numbers on to the invoice. Neither author appears aware of the modern method of using the order-book as accessions register—which all seems to show the need for some register of standard methods. Comparing the latter portions of the books, Mr. Barlow appears to have the greater value for the assistant, for where Mr. Gray has a chapter on law relating to finance and audit, Mr. Barlow has brief chapters on such matters as petty cash, internal control of expenditure, abstracts of accounts, and insurances.

Minor irritations one finds in both books. Apart from the tendency, an example of which has been given, of both authors to prescribe certain methods without explanation, in a manner reminiscent of the family doctor doling out pills, Mr. Gray is particularly prone to statements on policy, which are, after all, only his own opinion and not official pronouncements. A statement such as "buying book stock out of loan is not recommended," requires a good deal of justification, since it can be argued that the basic stock of a library is just as much capital investment as a building. In minor matters, also, the same fault appears—why is it so patent that a central stationery department is not a good thing?

Mr. Barlow's fault, dealing with practical matters, is chiefly one of not confining his remarks to his audience. Surely no one reading a book of this sort is ever likely to think that the librarian uses the fine receipts to buy books with—usually old ones?

But one must not carp. For two very interesting books one gives thanks, while repeating the private wish that they are not one still more interesting book.

F. M. G.



## The Divisions

### EAST MIDLAND

THE first Joint Meeting of the North Midland Branch of the Library Association and the East Midland Division of the A.A.L. was held at Chesterfield on Thursday, 15th September. The meeting took place in the Odeon Ballroom, where the Chairman of the Libraries' Committee (Councillor Short) extended a hearty welcome to the members.

"Elementary, my dear Watson" was the title of a lively paper given

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by Mr. R. Matthews (Nottingham). The problems and difficulties so often felt by new junior members of a staff, but so rarely expressed, were all brought into the light by Mr. Matthews, and followed by suggestions for their remedy. "How can new juniors be trained to a standard of efficiency without their early lack of experience leaving a mark upon the standard of the library's organization?"—this was one of the points in the speaker's paper which attracted much attention in the discussion which followed.

Mr. F. G. B. Hutchings (Deputy Librarian, Sheffield) was a visiting speaker to the meeting and presented some astonishing comparisons of statistics in his paper, "Large and small." Large and small libraries were compared and contrasted with regard to various items of expenditure, book funds, issue per 100 of population, and cost per inhabitant. To any of the audience hitherto unconvinced, Mr. Hutchings presented a sound case for the recognition of the small library, not as the weakest link in the chain, but as, frequently, the strongest.

Tea at the kind invitation of the Libraries' Committee and a tour of the new Chesterfield Town Hall, brought to a close a thoroughly successful Joint Meeting, which the East Midland Division hopes will become an annual event.

## GREATER LONDON DIVISION

As the result of the election concluded on 9th November, 1937, the following will serve on the Committee of the Greater London Division for 1939: Messrs. W. H. Phillips (255 votes), S. W. Martin (242), D. H. Halliday (236), W. B. Stevenson (229), F. Seymour Smith (206), Miss E. M. Exley (201), Messrs. S. G. Berriman (172), K. C. Harrison (170), E. V. Corbett (165), S. H. Horrocks (162), A. J. Wells (160). The following candidates were not elected: Miss S. T. P. Jacka (146), Messrs. R. W. Rouse (130), J. Hounscome (121), J. Riches (96), B. E. Q. Smith (96), F. Fordham (92), E. R. J. Hawkins (86).

The Chairman for 1939 will be Mr. R. Cooper, F.L.A. (Battersea).

## NORTH-EASTERN

A meeting of the Division was held in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on Wednesday, 19th October, 1938, by kind invitation of Mr. W. H. Gibson, F.L.A., City Librarian. In the afternoon about sixty members assembled in the Central Library, where they were joined by the Association's



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President (Mr. A. R. Hewitt). The party thereupon proceeded to the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Automatic Telephone Exchange where, by courtesy of the Telephone Manager (Mr. A. E. Ryland) capable guides conducted the members through the building and showed every stage in telephone operation from the generation of electricity in the basement to the handling of the trunk and local manual calls on the top floor.

After this comprehensive survey the members were glad to reach the Rendezvous Café, where they had tea, provided by the hospitality of the City Librarian. During tea, the Chairman of the Division (Mr. W. M. Martin) proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Gibson and to Mr. Ryland, which those present heartily endorsed.

After tea the party journeyed to Fenham, where Newcastle's latest branch library excited the admiration and perhaps envy of many who have to work in less pleasant surroundings.

The evening session began with the official welcome of the President by the Divisional Chairman, and after a very happily phrased response, the President took charge of the remainder of the meeting. This consisted of five short papers by members of the Fenham Branch Library staff and were "The Public and the library" (J. Smeaton), "A Branch library scrap-book" (W. A. Doughty), "New libraries for old" (J. S. Elliott), "Jottings of a library assistant" (A. D. Walton), and "On the reading of books" (H. E. Mate). All five papers, though different in subject-matter, were similar in treatment, as each attempted to give the writer's own point of view rather than the official view as shown in the text-books. A short discussion ensued, and the meeting closed with a vote of thanks, proposed by Miss M. S. Young, to the President and to the writers of the papers.

## SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE

The inaugural meeting of the 1938-39 Session was held at Cardiff on 19th October. During the afternoon the members visited Messrs. Lewis's Printing Works and saw the whole business of book production from manuscript to binding. Tea followed at the Cardiff Central Library, where a Round Table discussion was afterwards led by Mr. A. E. Sleight, Chairman of the Division. The subjects were varied: Male or female library assistants; Fiction reserves; and Control of spicy fiction. The members then moved on to the Cardiff City's Electricity Showrooms, where, after a tour around the building they saw the "Story of the book" and "Sabotage" in the Lecture Theatre.

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### SOUTH-WESTERN

A meeting of the Division was held at Winchester on Wednesday 12th October. Under the guidance of Mr. F. W. Pepper, City Librarian, the members were taken on a tour of St. Cross Hospital.

The General Meeting, which was in the form of a Magazine Evening, took place at the Winchester Public Library. The entries were of a high standard, consisting of contributions in verse, humour, drama, and professional subjects. Portsmouth took the honours of the evening, two of their members taking first and second places, while the third was taken by a contributor from Southampton. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to Mr. Pepper for his kindness in arranging the meeting.

### YORKSHIRE

A joint meeting of the Midland and Yorkshire Divisions of the A.A.L. and the Birmingham and District Branch of the L.A. was held at Leeds on Wednesday, 19th October, 1938, by kind permission of the Chairman and Members of the Leeds Libraries and Arts Committee.

The Midlanders were entertained to lunch at the Guildford Hotel, Leeds, by invitation of the Yorkshire Divisional Committee. Mr. Gillett, F.L.A., Chairman of the Yorkshire Division, welcomed the visitors, and Miss Lynes, Chairman of the Midland Division, replied.

After lunch members from the Yorkshire Division, along with the visitors, spent a short time viewing the Central Library, and subsequently had the privilege of inspecting, and hearing Mr. Gordon's description of, the model and plans of the proposed new Central Library, Art Gallery, and Museum.

Later two parties were formed. One of about 100 proceeded by bus to the Brotherton Library, where members were privileged to inspect the Brotherton Collection. After thanks to Dr. Offor, B.A., Ph.D., F.L.A., Librarian of the University Library, had been expressed by Mr. Gillett, the party then visited the new Sheepscar Library. The other party proceeded to view the new Sheepscar and Hunslet Branch Libraries.

Tea was kindly provided by the Chairman and Members of the Leeds Public Libraries and Arts Committee. Mr. Stiffin, Librarian of Nuneaton, proposed an omnibus vote of thanks to the Chairman and Members of the Leeds Public Libraries and Arts Committee for the hospitality, to Mr. R. J. Gordon, City Librarian, for the arrangement of a splendid programme. Mr. Sayell, Wakefield, supported. Mr. Gordon suitably replied, and

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Councillor Adamson, Deputy Chairman, replied on behalf of the Leeds Libraries and Arts Committee.

After tea members assembled at the City Museum for the evening meeting. Addresses were delivered by: Miss J. Paterson, West Midland Regional Library Bureau, "Library co-operation: its achievements and possibilities"; and Mr. H. H. Howarth, Deputy Librarian, Scarborough, "A Survey of libraries: buildings." Messrs. Hargreaves (Leeds) and Craven (Bradford) voiced the thanks of the meeting.

## Council Notes

A MEETING of the Council was held at Chaucer House, on the 2nd November, 1938, with the President in the chair.

The Press and Publications Committee, having given further consideration to the question of the subscription for the sale of individual copies of *Recommended books*, recommended that the annual subscription be reduced from the sum of 2s. 6d., as stated in the last issue of THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT, to the figure of 2s. for the 10 issues.

The Education Committee reported that 312 students had entered for the Courses commencing in November. The Committee considered the L.A. Draft Revised By-laws so far as they affected professional education, and made certain recommendations when the By-laws were considered in detail. The Hon. Librarian's proposed additions to the Association's library were approved and recommended for purchase.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee considered items of income and expenditure since the last meeting, and the Hon. Treasurer submitted estimates for the coming year, which were discussed and approved.

The Council adopted a motion by the South Wales and Monmouthshire Division, and decided to ask the L.A. to submit a draft of the proposed new examination syllabus for information. The Council then considered at very great length the Divisional Reports on the L.A. Draft Revised By-laws, 1938, and drew up a report in which opposition was expressed to the principles inherent in certain proposed by-laws, and suggesting amendments to others for the consideration of the L.A. Reorganization Committee.

Preliminary arrangements were discussed for the Section's Annual General Meeting in 1939, and it was agreed that as the form of the meeting at Leicester in 1938 had proved so successful similar arrangements should

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be made for 1939, the question of the place of meeting to be decided at a later date.

The Council appointed the President (Mr. A. Ll. Carver) and the Hon. Secretary (Mr. D. E. Coult) to serve as the Section's representatives on the L.A. Council during 1939, and the Hon. Editor (Mr. T. I. M. Clulow) to serve on the L.A. Publications Committee. The appointment of representatives to serve on the Education and Membership Committees was deferred to the January meeting.

After the formal business of the meeting was concluded, the Vice-President cordially thanked the President (Mr. A. R. Hewitt) on behalf of the Council for his services during the year in the conduct of the Council Meetings and for his untiring work for the Association during his period of office.

D. E. C.

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